



# The Director

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## Farewell Message from George Wilson, Executive Director Retiring July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010

As I approach my MO-CASE retirement date on July 1<sup>st</sup>, I feel grateful for the opportunities I have had to serve our profession. Although the number of people to whom I am indebted is too large to address here, I would like to mention several groups that I will never forget.

I must first acknowledge my contemporaries, i.e. old special educators, for their important accomplishments. I have had the privilege to work with many special education administrators, special education teachers, process coordinators, psychologists, higher education staff, DESE staff, and others in the field for many years. I think many of us started our careers believing that we would solve the problems in the field of special education which, of course, we failed to do. However, I have witnessed their efforts resulting in better outcomes for students with disabilities as well as a stronger professional organization. I will always admire their remarkable dedication, skill, and effort and will always feel privileged that I had the opportunity to work with them.

I am also grateful for those who are currently serving the causes of special education. Although I have enormous respect for "my generation" of special educators, I have been repeatedly and increasingly impressed by the contributions of the current generation of special educators. Their ability allows me to leave the profession knowing that great people are addressing the many issues we left to solve with compassion, intelligence, and skill.

Finally, I have also had the opportunity to meet a number of students and new administrators and I feel very encouraged that our profession is attracting such capable educators, eager and able to apply their talent and updated credentials to the challenges of special education.

My wish for you all is a career as personally and professionally rewarding as mine has been - one that will result in improved outcomes for students with disabilities and a brighter future for MO-CASE, the organization that represents our interests.

I very much appreciate your trust in and support of MO-CASE in recent years and know that your continued support will assist you all in achieving your professional goals.

## **Transition Services – the 'Child' Left Behind**

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The Individuals with Disability Education Act of 1990, the reauthorization of the special education law creating the IDEA, mandated Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for students with disabilities address the transition from school to adulthood. This mandate was based in part on preliminary data available from the National Longitudinal Transition Study of Students with Disabilities. The Transition Study found that students with disabilities had high drop-out rates and for those who completed high school participation in post-secondary education was at a rate significantly below that of the general population. The Transition Study also found, for those students who did not go into formal post-secondary education, employment was more likely to be in relatively low-status jobs. Few had incomes to sufficiently support independent living with more than half of the students with disabilities living in their family home when they had been out of school from three to five years.

The 1990 IDEA amendment thrilled many special educators involved in career and vocational education. During the next decade transition planning became a significant part of the IEP process. The National Longitudinal Transition Study, II, documents the improvements that the emphasis on transition brought to students with disabilities. By 2001, almost 8 in 10 out-of-school youth with disabilities had been engaged in postsecondary education, paid employment, or training to prepare them for employment. There had also been an increase in the number of jobs in the trades for males, a decrease in low-paying personal-care jobs for females, an increase in the average number of hours worked, an increase in the average hourly wages, and an increase in those living independently.

With the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act or No Child Left Behind (NCLB) by Congress in 2001, the focus of elementary and secondary became reading, math, assessment, accountability, and high school graduation rates. For accountability purposes students with disabilities had to graduate in four years. With the emphasis on graduation with a regular high school diploma, the transition needs of the students were often given a lower priority. The 2004 IDEA reauthorization incorporated the highly qualified teacher requirements established in NCLB. With special education teachers already in short supply, it is not surprising that schools found it difficult to hire special education teachers who were highly qualified in English, math, sciences, social studies, fine arts, or other areas and who also could prepare students with disabilities for life after school other than college. In addition, the 2004 IDEA

reauthorization also raised the minimum required age to address transition from age 14 to age 16 - thus, again, deemphasizing the importance of transition for students with disabilities.

These changes were supported by a point of view, common under No Child Left Behind, which implies that if one does not go to college, they are going to be left behind - a college degree is the only guarantee of well paying employment. Unfortunately, as one looks at the growing personal income disparities that developed during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century it is easy to see how this flawed concept - college for all - gained credence.

Does everyone need to go to college in order to obtain a job in the future? The U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics released data in 2008 looking at education and training requirements for current occupations. The BLS reported:

<u>Percent of Jobs</u>	<u>Required Education Level</u>
10.0	Less than high school diploma
27.2	High school diploma or equivalent
21.2	Some college, no degree
8.8	Associate's degree
20.6	Bachelor's degree
8.3	Master's degree
3.8	Doctoral or professional degree

The report indicates over a third of the jobs require only a high school diploma or less, about one third of the jobs require a bachelor's degree or higher, and a little less than a third require some advanced training beyond high school but not at a bachelor's degree level.

The BLS projects that of the 30 top growth areas of employment in 2018, 73.42% will only require on the job training and experience. Jobs requiring a first vocational certificate or an associate degree will make up 12.39% of the jobs. Only 17.17% of the fastest growing jobs in 2018 will require a bachelor's degree, doctoral degree, or first professional degree.

Hopefully, a college education is more than training for future employment. Education is a benefit that should be available to all. However, a college degree is marketed as a guarantee for a good job in the future - which it is not. College for all is a bad joke - unfortunately it can also be a very expensive one for those who end up with only a large student loan debt. There is a need for much more emphasis in high school on vocational training and post secondary education options other than college. Everyone needs to be educated, but not everyone needs to earn a college degree.

The preliminary discussions of the reauthorization of NCLB, call for an emphasis on college and career readiness. States would measure school performance on the basis of progress in getting all students, including groups of students who are members of minority groups, low-income, English learners, and students with disabilities, on track to college-and career-readiness. The danger is the emphasis will be on college and not career. The order of words often speaks to priorities. The listing of goals for the Race to the Top funds has the same order of listing with the first calling for adopting standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete in the global economy.

If our students with disabilities are to be well served we need to reassert an emphasis on transition planning and preparation. Many of our students need specific training in career awareness, job skills, work related behaviors, and social skills. While college should be an option available to students with disabilities, there is a need for special educators to ensure that college is not their only option and that the students with disabilities and their families fully understand the choices available and the benefits and liabilities of those choices. For this to happen there needs to be a refocus on career education beginning at the elementary level and greater emphasis on vocational exploration and training at the secondary level. We, as special educators, need to be advocating for greater emphasis on transition when IDEA is considered for reauthorization in the next few months. Transition services is the 'child' that can no longer be left behind.

### TOP HONORS FOR ADVOCACY ~



Missouri CASE (MO-CASE) was honored for their work in the area of legislative action. MO-CASE established an Advocacy Network to assist with systematic communications across all legislative avenues. In addition, the strong collaboration of school administrators' organizations and the school boards association creates a unified advocacy message that legislators have appreciated. For the first time, MO-CASE is in a position to be more proactive than reactive as the educational organizations and lobbyists recognize MO-CASE as the "go to" organization when special education issues arise within the state.



## IMPORTANT DATES:



Special Education Administrators' Conference Tan-Tar-A Resort	September 26 <sup>th</sup> -28 <sup>th</sup>
MO-CASE Winter Institute St. Charles Convention Center	December 2-3, 2011
Spring Law Conference Lodge of Four Seasons	March 11, 2011

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